

Wing trains with allies at Maple Flag

By Maj. Gary Webb
Wing readiness chief

The 48th Fighter Wing deployed F-15Es and F-15Cs from all three squadrons to Cold Lake, Canada, for Maple Flag beginning May 23. The exercise ends Saturday.

"Maple Flag is an excellent opportunity to integrate with our NATO allies and accomplish composite force operations," said Maj. Al Cross, 492nd Fighter Squadron assistant operations officer. "In addition, Maple Flag provides the opportunity to train with our allies we seldom fly with or against."

The objective of the exercise is to provide junior combat aircrews with realistic training in a simulated air combat environment with an emphasis toward large-package coalition air forces, according to Capt. Bruce Duggan, Maple Flag stand-eval and weapons staff officer.

One of the major advantages for the Liberty Wing to participate in Maple Flag is to refine its "rainbow" maintenance as the 492nd and 494th fighter squadrons worked and flew together. Maintenance poses significant challenges as the wing designs the optimum deployment package of people and equipment for sustained operations.

Maple Flag participants included Canadian CF-18s, USAF F-15Cs and F-16Cs, USAF F-15Es from the Liberty Wing, German F-4s, Dutch recce F-16s, NATO E-3s and F-16s from Singapore.

Adversary air was provided by the Nellis AFB, Nev., aggressor F-16 squadron, F-16s from Luke AFB, Ariz., and more Canadian CF-18s. Each day was characterized by two flying periods, each with about 75 aircraft in simulated combat.

One of the many benefits of Maple Flag is its remote location, approximately 300 miles north of Montana. The landscape is devoid of the mountains and desert that are the Red Flag trademark. The area is flat and has many lakes. The targets on the range are carved out of the thick forests. The trees grow to be a couple of hundred feet tall and scoot under the jets as they fly 500 feet above the terrain. But as nice as the change of scenery is for aircrew, the opportunity for a change of tactics and the lakes and forests breed problems for the maintainers on the ground.

A Canadian customs officer said that Cold Lake has two seasons, winter and mosquito. According to 1st Lt. Paul Hibbard, 494th fighter pilot, the snow melted the beginning of May.

"We were dogfighting the mosquitoes for dibs on first shots on the aggressor F-16s from Nellis," he said. But once the aircrew were in their jets, they were protected from the swarms of bugs.

Maple Flag evolved from the U.S. Air Force exercise Red Flag. The first Canadian participation at Red Flag was in 1977. In 1978, the U.S. Air Force held the first Red Flag north and named it Maple Flag. The current format is an annual six-week exercise simulating a United Nations coalition effort and is sponsored by Nellis Red Flag and range staffs.

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Courtesy photo

Signs of safety

Base Civil Engineers, working with Wing Safety and local authorities, have enhanced the safety on the A1065 "Brandon Road," with new signs announcing the presence of the base, reducing speed limits to 40 miles per hour, and extending the speed zone. The signs let passing motorists know that they are approaching gates to RAF Lakenheath, which should cause lower speeds on the approach to the intersection. The new signs tell motorists to "slow down" as well, comparable to the signs usually seen upon entering a local village.

Liberty Wing receives USAFE safety award

The 48th Fighter Wing was awarded the U.S. Air Forces in Europe Outstanding Unit Safety award for 1996, the command's highest recognition for achievement in overall mishap prevention.

Col. Vince Horrigan, 3rd Air Force vice commander, presented the award to Col. Doug Richardson, 48th FW commander, June 5. It is the third year in a row and fourth in five years the award has been presented to the Liberty Wing.

"The Liberty Wing continues to lead the way in preventing mishaps," said Lt. Col. Rick Martin, 48th FW chief of safety. "It took a team effort. Everyone contributes to safety, and everyone shares the credit for this award."

The award is based on reported mishaps in flight, ground and weapon safety. The USAFE safety staff evaluates the overall safety program of each unit and recommends deserving units to the Safety Awards Board.